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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001404

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: KURDISH VIEWS ON AKP NON-CLOSURE, ERGENEKON

Classified By: Classified By: Adana Principal Officer Eric Green,
Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (U) This is an AmConsulate Adana message.

12. (C) Summary: Kurds in Turkey,s southeast expressed relief but not elation that the Constitutional Court declined to ban the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). AKP support remains high in conservative parts of the southeast, but nationalist Kurds believe AKP has failed to deliver on its promises to address the Kurdish problem. Some voiced hope that the party will invigorate efforts to join the EU by introducing a new, democratic constitution while others fear the party will grow more cautious after being chastised by the court. Facing its own closure case and continued internal divisions, the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) remains on the sidelines. Kurdish leaders also welcomed the revelations coming out in the Ergenekon crime investigation) some saying &we told you the deep state controls everything8) but criticized the prosecutors for failing to investigate crimes against Kurds committed by the accused. End summary.

AKP: BETTER OPEN THAN CLOSED

13. (U) During travel in Turkey's southeast July 28-31, Adana Principal Officer met with a range of contacts in Van, Mus, Bitlis, Bingol and was in Diyarbakir when the Constitutional Court issued its July 30 verdict to fine but not close the AKP.

14. (C) Diyarbakir Mayor Baydemir remarked that not closing a party is not a sign that democracy has arrived. He stressed the court,s motivations were political, speculating that they probably concluded that it was unwise to ban a party that had received nearly 50% of the votes in the last election. He added that, without AKP, the DTP would have been the only party left representing Turkey,s southeast, which the establishment would have regarded as dangerous. The closure verdict and Ergenekon cases, he said, show that the distribution of power between the state and the government is still in dispute. A new constitution is the obvious way to resolve these issues, but he is not sure whether AKP will move in that direction. If AKP passes a constitution with language and culture rights for Kurds and it lowers the 10 percent party election threshold, he said, then &we can disarm the PKK.8

15. (C) Civic leaders in Van expressed disappointment in AKP,s performance since the 2007 election and voiced doubt that AKP will engage on the Kurdish issue per se in the near future by, for example, establishing a substantive dialogue with DTP or civil society groups to discuss the issue. The

mishandling of March,s Nevruz celebrations, which resulted in four deaths, is still reverberating against AKP. Zahir Kandasoglu, President of the Van Chamber of Commerce (who was formerly close to AKP), recounted how he pleaded with the governor and others to show flexibility in dealing with Nevruz, but was rebuffed and even accused of lobbying on behalf of DTP. Ayhan Cabuk, president of the Van Bar Association, noted that, even if AKP did not explicitly authorize the heavy-handed security reaction to the Nevruz events, they are implicitly condoning it by failing to condemn or effectively investigate the deaths and well-documented police brutality.

¶6. (C) Sahismail Bedirhanoglu, a business leader in Diyarbakir, expressed hope that AKP will accelerate its EU reforms, which would be &good for AKP, good for Turkey and good for Kurds.8 Other contacts were less sanguine; a number of Diyarbakir-based journalists predicted AKP will act more cautiously now, either because it will have reached an agreement with the establishment to moderate its appetite for change or because it fears being slapped down again. Mursel Acay, the local head of Sabah Newspaper, predicted AKP will now put major reforms on the shelf and focus on the March 2009 local elections, adding that AKP politicians on the stump are bound to raise more questions about their commitment to secularism since they are likely to accentuate their religious messages to win votes.

¶7. (C) Bitlis, Mus and Bingol provinces are among Turkey,s poorest and most conservative, as evidenced by the preponderance of covered women (many sporting the full-length

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black chador) and the unavailability of alcohol (Mus reportedly has no bars and one liquor store; Bingol has neither). While, DTP has a base of support in urban areas, AKP,s religious conservatism, its poverty-reduction measures, and cultivation of tribal networks have played well and local observers believe its popularity will remain steady despite the lack of progress on the Kurdish issue.

DTP STILL ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK

¶8. (C) While the Constitutional Court spared AKP and, a few months ago, also declined to close down a tiny Kurdish party (Hak-Par), many in the region expect a negative decision in a similar case against DTP, given its association with the PKK. Curiously, the chairman of the "Peace and Democracy Party" (BDP), established to succeed DTP, Mustafa Ayzit, told us he intends to distance the new party from the PKK. (If DTP were closed and succeeded by BDP, Ayzit and his heterodox views would likely be marginalized rapidly. Ayzit freely admits that his appointment as chairman says more about DTP,s utter failure to manage its affairs than its interest in adopting his viewpoint.)

ERGENEKON: KURDISH FOR &WE TOLD YOU SO8

¶9. (C) The Ergenekon case,shows how correctly we analyzed everything, Baydemir said (half jokingly)) there really were conspiracies everywhere. He said &the indictment only captures a fraction of the exposed part of the iceberg8; the group,s activities east of the Euphrates (i.e. Kurdish areas) are hardly mentioned even though the suspects were responsible for serious human rights violations against Kurds during the 1990s. In addition, Baydemir noted that the investigation is incomplete because the &coup diaries8 released in 2006, are not mentioned in the indictment, nor are active-duty security personnel. Baydemir said one crime in the southeast discussed in the indictment involved an assassination attempt on him. While the indictment describes the plot (one of many Baydemir has been briefed on), in which a convicted prisoner was released from detention, armed and provided with the mayor,s schedule, no active-duty

accomplices are implicated. &I,m sure the provincial security director was aware of this plot,8 he said. Baydemir and other DTP sympathizers were also quick to pin blame for recent terrorist attacks in Istanbul (at the U.S. ConGen and in the Gungoren district) and the instability in Kirkuk on Ergenekon,s desire to instigate Turkish-Kurdish tension and violence.

¶10. (C) Others echoed the theme that Ergenekon appears to be a vehicle for Turks in the western part of the country to achieve justice, but it leaves the crimes against Kurds unresolved. Faruk Balikci, a leading local journalist, remarked that one key suspect, retired military officer Levent Ersever, was responsible for the disappearance of two leading Kurdish politicians in the 1990s, yet the investigators have not even questioned anyone in the region in connection to those cases. He added that the case is primarily driven by AKP,s desire for revenge against elements of the deep state, not to clean up the deep state. If that was AKP,s agenda, it would not have defended the military in the 2005 Semdinli case, when intelligence officers successfully evaded prosecution after being caught setting off a deadly bomb in a Kurdish bookstore.

¶11. (C) The alleged contacts between Ergenekon suspects and PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan (claimed recently by Ocalan through his lawyers) add another layer of local flavor to the story. Bedrihanoglu, who is not sympathetic to the PKK, told us he believes the conjecture that the deep state has colluded with the terrorists to ramp up nationalist emotions to pressure the AKP government. Everything the PKK has done in recent years has benefited conservative forces in Turkey, he said, including the PKK,s resuming hostilities in 2004 after a five-year cease-fire, a decision that was made following the alleged contacts between Ocalan and members of Ergenekon. The end of the cease-fire, he added, has never been adequately explained to PKK followers. More recently, the bloody attacks during last year,s election campaign seemed all but designed to embarrass the ruling party and boost support for the nationalist CHP and MHP parties.

¶12. (C) Diyarbakir Bar Association President Sezgin Tanrikulu

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said that the arrest of previously untouchable retired generals is an important symbolic step forward for Turkey,s democracy. On a lighter note, he said the lawyer of Gen (Rtd.) Tolon (a key figure who is still in custody) is a friend of his and reported that, when the police came to arrest him, Tolon called his lawyer and asked what to do. The lawyer told him to ask if the police had an arrest warrant and permission from the Turkish General Staff. Tanrikulu joked that any Kurdish villager knows more about what to ask an arresting officer than Tolon did.

COMMENT

¶13. (C) Through the Kurdish prism, the AKP,s survival is a welcome step, but not of any help to their concerns unless the party reverses course and rededicates itself to the EU project, anchored by meaningful constitutional reform that includes respect for the multiple ethnic identities present in Turkey. The tangled Ergenekon affair, meanwhile, in addition to providing over 2500 hundred pages of fodder for conspiracy theorists, offers Kurdish nationalists some measure of vindication regarding their claims about the machinations of the deep state. But the case will also be used by many strident Kurdish nationalists as an excuse to evade responsibility for anything the PKK is accused of doing and reinforce their counterproductive reflex of blaming all their woes on Ankara.

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